

HARVARD COLLEGE OBSERVATORY
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Professor Joshua Lederberg
Genetics Building
University of Wisconsin
Madison 6, Wisconsin

Dear Dr. Lederberg:

Thank you for your reprint about biological space research. I was very interested to read it, and I quite agree that there is the possibility of the transference of organic materials amongst the planets or even further afield. In fact I recall giving a lecture on this subject in Cambridge, England, in about 1949.

I am in complete agreement with you that Mars and Venus should not be contaminated by terrestrial life until there has been a chance to examine what is there. One could, in that case, visualize the possibility, remote though it is, that physical and chemical circumstances ~~are~~ ^{are} suitable for the reproduction of some terrestrial micro-organisms whose presence might mislead us later and who might even displace some local form of life. This argument does not apply to the case of the Moon, of course, and there it would seem to me that contamination should only be kept so low that the chance of finding some contaminant in any sample that is later collected is extremely small. I am not really sure that I would even be worried about the contamination, gross though it is, of a dead dog plunging into the Moon, but I agree that that point is possibly debatable. Certainly sterilizing rockets before letting them go seems to me over-cautious by quite a large margin.

I should be very glad to be put on your mailing list for any other space-biological articles that you may write, especially as I am on the committee that is concerned with making recommendations in this field, amongst others.

Yours sincerely,



T. Gold
Professor of Astronomy

TG:mad